

**VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
ANNUAL REPORT
JULY 2008, TO JULY 2009**

From: Jamie Dance, Co-Chairman

Our year began on August 10 with a Board Retreat held at the home of Tony Wiggins that was called to look back at accomplishments and goals met and forward to those hoped for in the year ahead. Prioritizing areas of interest to be addressed in the coming year during this process enabled the Program Committee to focus its search for speakers for our General Meetings. It was an enervating and enjoyable day led by board member, Joanne Bray.

Our General meetings continued to be held at the Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk. Board members who so desired were invited to dine with the invited speaker at their own expense prior to the meeting. Our monthly Board Meetings were held in members' homes. For the first time in VOTF Bridgeport history, the Board is led by two members, Dan Sullivan and Jamie Dance, who act as Co-Chairs.

2008-2009 Program

Speakers:

Since September 2008, our speakers have included:

Joseph O'Callaghan, Professor Emeritus in Medieval History at Fordham University, and one of our board members, spoke on the history of the Eucharist.

Dan Bartley, VOTF National President, spoke on the new national VOTF Strategic Plan.

Margaret Farley, Professor of Ethics and recently retired from Yale Divinity School, spoke on “Forgiveness in the Service of Justice”.

Paul Scarbrough, Co- President of Call To Action USA, spoke on “The Changing Face of Catholicism: Opportunities and Challenges for Reform Movements”.

Carmine Galasso, photojournalist and author of *Crosses*, spoke on the experience of interviewing and photographing victims of clergy sexual abuse.

Judith Kubicki, Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University, spoke on “The Place of Christ in the Community at Worship”.

Elizabeth Dreyer, Professor of Religious Studies at Fairfield University, spoke on the topic, “The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly”.

Beth McCabe and Brian Walsh, SNAP representatives, spoke on the issues facing survivors of clerical sexual abuse, particularly as regards their legal options in state courts.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE, MARCH 28, AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY

“Do This in Memory of Me”

The Future of the Eucharist

Our Annual Conference, presented by Fairfield University Center for Catholic Studies and VOTF Bridgeport, featured keynote speaker, John Baldovin, S.J., noted liturgist and professor at the Weston School of Theology. Fr. Baldovin spoke on “The Eucharist at the Center of the Christian Mission”. A discussion moderated by Professor Nancy Dallavalle followed his presentation. Professor Ann R. Riggs of Rivier College later spoke on “Women and the Eucharist: Can the Body of Christ be Female?” Joseph O’Callaghan moderated the discussion that followed.

The afternoon schedule showcased an innovation that proved very popular among the assembly. Two panels of young adult Catholics, one featuring students from Fairfield University and Yale Divinity School, the other, a bit older group who were or are active in parish life, were invited to speak on the future of the Eucharist from the vantage point of their own perspectives. Following personal statements by the panelists, the audience was invited into the conversation. It proved to be an enlightening experience for all.

A Mass, "Healing the Wound in the Body of Christ: A Liturgy of Reconciliation", celebrated by Fr. James Bowler, closed the conference.

FIRST ANNUAL VOTF IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT VOLUNTEER AWARD

This award, The St. Anselm of Canterbury Award, was presented at the conference to Joseph O'Callaghan to honor his service to this organization.

2009 VOTF VOICE OF COMPASSION AWARDS

Gifts amounting to \$12,250 were distributed to eight non-profit organizations at the conference. Among those receiving donations were the Christian Counseling Center and Manna House of Hospitality, the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Black Rock Food pantry, Daughters of the Most Precious Blood, the Sexual Abuse Crisis Center, the Dorothy Day Center, and the Connecticut Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This has been a particularly contentious period for VOTF Bridgeport. Connecticut Bill 1098 came out of the Judicial Committee as a complete surprise to VOTF. The legislation was designed to give Catholic parishioners more authority over parish financial issues and unfortunately disenfranchised the bishop. Great upheaval ensued in the diocese, and we suffered as collateral damage. The next blow came when the Connecticut Supreme Court refused to reverse the lower court's ruling against the bishop in the Rosado case, a case that involves the release of documents

related to clerical sexual abuse in the diocese. The bishop and his legal team are now mounting an appeal to the US Supreme Court. Great efforts were made to respond quickly and appropriately to the bishop's public relations and legal teams when events called for it. VOTF Bridgeport remains committed to being a voice for the laity in the pews and priests and religious of integrity.

Internally, VOTF Bridgeport continues to flourish because of the dedication and incredible abilities of its members. Two Study Groups begun two years ago continue to meet regularly and have an active membership. The Women's Group is led by Joanne Bray and looks at Church issues from a feminine perspective. The Study Group on Church Governance is lead by Jamie Dance and Joe O'Callaghan and has examined Church governance structures in both the American Church and the Vatican, relating both to the documents of Vatican Council II.

THE FUTURE

The future of VOTF Bridgeport remains bright, but not because of increased membership, unfortunately. We are a small but talented group of men and women who are dedicated to reforming our Church. We stand tall with those who treasure the Body of Christ as a living exemplar of what it means to be Church. We offer safe haven to those Catholics who need to hear of a better way to share God's love with God's people, defending and loving the abused and marginalized among us.

Jamie Dance